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The Church
and
International Peace

A Series of Papers by the Trustees of

THE CHURCH PEACE UNION

VIII

The Church and the Ideal

by

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THE CHURCH PEACE UNION

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The Church and International Peace

A uniform series of papers by the Trustees of The Church Peace Union, treating the problems of war and peace from the point of view of religion, and especially emphasizing the message the Church should have for the world in this time of war.

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The Church and the Ideal

By Rt. Rev. William Lawrence, D.D.

This is a time for prayer rather than for preaching. This is not the time for national or personal self-satisfaction that we being at peace are not what other and warring nations and peoples are; that these horrors could not occur in this country because we are a democracy, our people are governed by their representatives and not by an autocrat who may declare war in spite of the people, or because we do not believe in taking possession of the lands of other peoples against their will. Although we may recall with gratitude our retirement from Cuba, we may also recall the fact that much of the land which we occupy was conquered from the Indians and by their extermination.

Still less is this a time to sit in judgment upon others and declare who is to blame for this awful war. The evidence is not all in yet and probably will not be in our lifetime. We are wise if we leave these judgments with God.

The fact is that the *people* of these nations, those who are fighting and suffering and dying, those who are shouting in exultation or shrieking in pain believe that they are fighting for the defense of their country, their homes and their posterity. Patriotism, the motive which has been extolled for centuries, is at the heart of their action; it is that which is sending each day thousands against the steel of thousands.

What we should be doing, we children of a republic, bred in liberty, if we were in close contact with other nations like those of Europe, if we felt hemmed in and smothered, if we thought that our liberties or even our commerce were at stake, if we were divided by racial stocks and the memories of religious warfare, if parts of our country traded or won in warfare forward and back were to be torn from us, we should not dare to say. We should probably be doing

as these nations are, fighting for what we believe our rights, our honor, or our homes.

Though we be Americans and peace loving, liberty loving people, we are men and women subject to the passions and greeds of others. When national or commercial or political interest dominates us, we are not altogether free from the theory that might makes right.

The weakness, the temptations and sins of other people are ours also. We for instance are interested today that the ethics of nations, of strong and great bodies of people should be founded upon the same principles as the ethics of individuals. The plighted word must be kept; dealings must be mutually honorable even though every condition be not named in the bond; the weakest must have the same treatment that is yielded to the strongest; to make treaties or bargains with one party while one is secretly making bargains inconsistent with these with others is wrong.

We have been quick during these two months to criticize or condemn these lapses of national honor, honesty or justice. Let us look to ourselves. Are we in our days of peace entirely free from these faults? Are we clear that the standards of ethics in our commercial, political or national life are the standards of personal ethics?

We form ourselves into corporations, great, strong bodies of men, whether capitalists or workingmen. Surely we are not stranger to the thought that what we may not do as individuals we may do as a corporate body. Might at times has made right. The strong ride over the weak. Secret contracts inconsistent with public agreements are not unknown; the armament of material forces is strong and breaks down the defences of justice and truth at times. Men are in peace what they are liable to be in war. We are of like passions with other men; their sins are our sins, wherefore let us "pray to this end that God forgive us our sins, our ignorance of His holy will, our wilfulness and many errors, and lead us in the paths of obedience to places of vision and to thoughts and counsels that purge and make wise." Conscious

of our faults, humbled by our sins, and brought by confession to places of vision, what may we see beyond? The vista of the future is full of mists and we know not where the nations may be led through this deep, dark valley of slaughter, death and sorrow.

A few rays of light pierce the mists even now. We look for hopeful thoughts. We have the right to gather a few of them today that they may cheer us as we go forward. Let me name over some of these messages of hope.

1. Has it not been borne in upon the people of the world since this war began that war, victory by force, seldom settles anything satisfactorily? In former times this was the accepted way for the settlement of tribal or national differences, today we are beginning to rebel against it. Whichever side by victory gains land or harbor or commerce or indemnity has made for itself an enemy who will bide his time and in some hour of national stress smite and take vengeance.

There has been a world-wide movement in these last years which calls upon nations to respect the traditions and rights of people, even the weakest and lowliest. Men the world over, when they think, are becoming more and more convinced that war is not only brutal and wicked but that it is stupid. Intelligent people may condone wickedness, but they will condemn and stop at stupidity.

2. Are we not becoming convinced that the increase of great armaments, which in peace has been bleeding the nations in money and life, is instead of being a bulwark of peace, a temptation for war?

When citizens carry pistols and dirks for self-defense, they are liable in a time of fright to draw and use them. They do not mean to be aggressors; they are in a moment of panic simply defending themselves.

Just such a panic seems to have swept over these nations; the common interests of religion, literature, blood and friendship counted for naught; life was in danger; they must strike and strike quickly, or the other might kill first. And so that noble sentiment of patriotism was kindled in a moment, they

and their children were threatened; stand and fight the aggressor.

We are thinking what a few days of quiet reasoning might have done if the cannons had not been already loaded and the bayonets fixed, and we believe that the whole world will think harder than ever upon this point. Settlements through reason and discussion, through an appeal to public opinion and men's sense of justice gain the respect of men's judgments and have as their basis confidence in their fellows, their desire to do the right thing.

To be sure, there rises before us the vital question as to who is to enforce these judgments and conclusions. In the last resort we have to fall back even in our personal differences and the decisions of the courts upon the police and the jail. Is such a resort possible in international disputes, even when national honor is at stake?

The history of the defense of personal honor through public opinion and not through the duel is full of hope, but it does not altogether meet the questions of national honor. We are confident, however, that God will lead us in paths of obedience to places of visions and to "thoughts and counsels that purge and make wise."

The history of this movement of appeal to public opinion during our generation is full of hope. Disappointments there have been, many and great. The awful disappointment of this awful war almost overwhelms us.

Let our thoughts dwell on the facts of the Hague Conferences and the Hague Tribunal; upon treaty after treaty looking to mutual confidence, justice and respect for public opinion made and kept.

Let us appreciate more fully the fact that the dream of a World's Peace has passed beyond the imaginings of sentimentalists and has entered into and taken possession of the thoughts of great statesmen as a goal to be worked for.

3. Again, the increasing sensitiveness of people throughout the world to physical pain and suffering, their horror at cruelty, the aversion to slaughter and the shambles of death

are causing men and women and children to hate war, to turn their faces from it. In the excitement of battle, in the thrills of patriotism these sentiments are forgotten, but they are gaining control over people's thoughts and action.

May we not go further? May not the day be approaching faster than we think when a false form of patriotism, my country right or wrong, will be frowned upon by the public opinion of the world? So long as national might makes right, this false patriotism will endure.

Higher conceptions of the rights of others, the well being of all nations, are bound to temper patriotism and make it more reasonable, more just and humane. For in the increasing consciousness of the sacredness of the individual which Christ teaches and which is at the basis of democracy, it is discovered that the burdens, the sufferings and the costs of war fall most heavily, not upon the leaders, not upon the rich, not even upon the brave men who lie wounded and dead in the trenches, but upon the women and children, upon the great body of the common people. With the people in power, the governors of themselves, nations will think long and move slowly before they involve themselves in wars for which they are bound to be the heaviest sufferers.

These and many other thoughts which come to mind are full of hope. Live in them, dwell in them, press them upon your own imaginations and tell them to others. Recognize the difficulties, accept the objections, but do not yield to them. The future is full of problems and the cause of Peace is harrassed by hostile forces. The greatest and noblest statesmen know not which way to lead or where the path will open. Be confident that God will open a path, and watch for it.

Let us take an even higher place of vision. The glory of the Christian Church is highest when she stands for ideals. The heralds of the Son of God sang, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will towards man." At that moment history tells us that all nations were at peace.

Throughout these twenty centuries, through all the wars of conquest and hate, that heavenly song has rung out as the

hope of mankind. God has in His mind, we believe, the consummation of a world-wide peace. When or where we know not yet. The cause of truth and justice may compel its servants to obey the word of their Master, "I come not to send peace but a sword." Wars for the right are not over yet. Wars of greed, race hatred and false patriotism may be waged in future again and again. But God's kingdom is coming, His Kingdom of Peace. In spite of disheartening checks, of cynicism and opposition, the Christian's privilege is to stand for the ideal and to work for it. Work for it in the way that the heavenly choir points out, through good will. Let us respect the peoples of other races, enter with sympathy into their hopes; let us try to discover the better and not the worse in men; let us love our neighbors as ourselves. And we shall do our part in preparing the world for that lasting peace which is the crowning virtue and happiness of all people.

God has His plan for peace, His path towards international good will. Let us pray and pray earnestly that He will show us that path that we may walk in it.

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